



EDITORIAL

WITHIN recent months, changing conditions in America at war have been bringing more regulations to civilians, while our younger men and young women, too, in ever-increasing numbers have been taking on the strict routines of life in the armed services. Inevitably this has raised many questions in the minds of thoughtful people. From parents of nursery age children, from teachers, from those who see restless, disturbed adolescents at school and at work, the feeling is the same: the war has shortened the period of childhood, our boys and girls are grown-up over night, and they have to meet a new, hard world. Are we preparing them for this regimented living? Has the freedom and concern for the individual that characterized recent educational methods been adequate? Or would we do better to tighten up on our procedures, to start preparing our children from the beginning with stricter routines, with more rules and regulations? It is an old confusion in a new setting.

The pendulum in many places seems to be swinging toward more control, more "training," more planning for group conformity, even in democratic nations whose avowed philosophy runs counter to these very ideas. There are interesting indications, however, from high places that this may *not* be the answer. As far back as March 8, 1942, the *New York Times* quoted an Army statement that "discipline must be built upon the intelligence, sportsmanship, individuality and group cooperativeness of the men in the ranks," and that "iron discipline" and the old type of military training was not necessary. The Army and Navy practice of assigning men to the special service for which they are best fitted by ability also bears out the theory that mere training is not enough, without aptitude and interest. A doctor, home on furlough from one of the southern camps, reports that the boys who seem to be making the best adjustment to the demands of Army routine are often those from so-called sheltered homes, where they have had the chance to develop self-confidence and a certain kind of individual integrity in an atmosphere of love and understanding.

These ideas, also, are not new, but now they are found in new places. They suggest and confirm the findings in the field of child development and education which have been built up on the basis of sound research during the past few decades.

The articles in this issue explore these ideas further. Training alone, in the sense of hard and fast routines and repetition, has not worked. Our knowledge leads us to an altogether different approach. We have learned that it is sound and healthy for a child to develop at his own speed and in his own rhythm, so that he feels comfortable and secure. He can be helped and encouraged to give up one stage for the next on the slow path to maturity, but he should not be pushed faster than he can go. With patience and affection and understanding of his own special qualities we can do more to help a child toward the character and resourcefulness and self-reliance that he will need, than with all the "habit training" by rule that can be devised. Though this may seem to be the easy, soft way, it is in fact the slow, hard way, as parents and teachers well know. But it is the best way for sound, lasting results.

THE EDITORS.

The Roots of Character

By ANNA W. M. WOLF

THE idea that good habits, *i.e.*, good character (or are they really the same thing?) are the result of careful training, begun early and carried out consistently on the part of parents and teachers, dies hard. Fortunately, however, there are more and more parents and teachers today who see that their job does not consist only of instructing their children or even of "setting a good example." It goes further, too, than rewarding good patterns of behavior and punishing bad ones. Inevitably, of course, parents, especially during the child's nursery years, are bound to do some of just these things. Children most assuredly need a chance to discover the difference between right and wrong—what things are socially acceptable and what are socially taboo, what will earn them friendship and a comfortable place among their fellows and what will, on the other hand, lose them the love and approval they crave. But such experiences are the merest beginning of character development, and unless families and others see beyond them, and more deeply, they are likely to be disappointed when the child's "training" does not bear the fruits they expected.

There are, I believe, two words, or preferably the living ideas behind the words, that those who deal with young children should keep in mind. One is *readiness*, the other is *relationship*. The clarity with which adults understand these concepts will have more to do with success and failure in educating children than the most rigid consistency and the most careful training could possibly accomplish.

Take *readiness* first: We are largely indebted to Dr. Arnold Gesell for his careful and ingenious demonstrations that the maturing process is all-important in what the child is able to learn. Despite every effort, you cannot teach a month-old child to walk; on the other hand, a fifteen month old child can hardly be kept from walking. Your teaching has little to do with it—the maturing process everything. You can't teach a six-year-old long-division (unless he is an embryo Einstein); at ten or eleven the average child learns with comparative ease. There is always, of course, a borderline at which enormous efforts on the

part of grown-ups, though they are of questionable worth, may bring results. You *can* teach a five-year-old to read—but at what pain and anguish! At seven, just because they have had two more years of growth, most children will learn in a brief span and with little effort. At the age of ten, for example, given children of about equal native intelligence, the fact that one child may have learned to read much earlier than the other gives him not the slightest advantage over the one who learned later—in fact, socially and physically he may even be at a disadvantage.

These facts are now for the most part accepted in regard to the teaching of academic subjects, yet they have had much less currency in regard to the teaching of habits and routines in children's daily life—the things that are supposed to be the stuff of character. Here unfortunately the principle of *readiness* is forgotten and the old, you-can't-learn-a-good-thing-too-young dogma holds sway in many homes—and also, alas, in many educational circles. According to this view, parents should begin to teach bladder and bowel control at a few months of age, to instill habits of independence by letting babies "cry it out" unless they are physically endangered by safety-pins or colic. A little later, children should form the habit of "finishing their meals" of "eating everything put before them" of being Spartan about bumps, of playing alone and of a host of other more or less adult and civilized behavior patterns, long before they are out of what used to be the cradle—until we were taught (questionably) that rocking forms bad habits.

On the negative side, various undesirable modes of behavior—like thumb-sucking, putting toys in the mouth, masturbation; and a little later hitting, biting, selfishness, untruthfulness; and later reading the comics or being rude to grandmother—all these are too often dealt with in the same way. Nip them in the bud as soon as they rear their ugly heads. Nearly everything that grown-ups don't like are lumped together as bad habits and regarded as the result of faulty training and insufficient strictness in putting the foot down at the very start. Scant consideration is given to whether in some cases the be-

havior is altogether characteristic of infancy and should be let alone, or whether it represents a complex pattern of character springing from a multiplicity of deep-lying causes. In either case, "training" and "cracking down" are definitely not the answer.

To go back to the *readiness* principle. The more we know about children, the clearer it becomes that they are not ready to learn to be dry during night and nap-time until after fifteen months. And, of course, these times for learning will always vary somewhat with the individual child.

Many children are normally wet at night and occasionally in the daytime until three or four years old. Even better than the calendar as an index to when to begin training are the child's own signs of readiness such as the grunting, pointing, flushing, wiggling or monosyllable that the alert mother learns to recognize. Screaming and resistance to toilet training are always the sign to leave off and try again at a later date. Suppositories to force regularity lay the foundation for later trouble and stubbornness. The early trained, "cleanly" infant is by no means a feather in the mother's cap. On the contrary there is increasing psychiatric evidence showing the ill effects of these things in fussy, stubborn or hostile personalities in later life.

Just as a lively unashamed interest in products of his body is suitable for the young child but a pathological sign in older children or adults, so, too, the impulse to suck (thumb or objects), to masturbate, to experiment with "dirty" language, to tell "tall stories," to be selfish, to express hatred unabashedly are all normal phases of the young child's life but have different significance when they occur later in life. We know that if parents can understand this thoroughly and refrain from injecting their own anxiety into the situation as an enormously complicating factor, children do actually, as a general rule, outgrow these things. Time is on our side. In daily contact with adult standards and civilized living, children do eventually give up infantile pleasures and begin to control primitive instincts, as the price of being included in the ranks of acceptable members of society. If they are hurried and pushed and punished by strict, anxious grown-ups, even though they may submit, their genuinely wholesome development is seriously jeopardized. Not only are they more likely to relapse to infantilisms when the parents have decided that such and such problem is well behind them, but, in addition, various forms of neurotic character formations result, all the more insidious

because the connection to early "overtraining" and severe repressive measures is by no means obvious.

It is highly important, of course, that parents should not draw the conclusion that because overtraining and too early training are bad things that there should be no training at all. No child brought up in our civilized society wants to be allowed to go on wetting himself, or screaming or having tempers, indulging his sexual wishes or committing aggressions. He wants parents who are what he thinks of as "good" parents—that is, parents who have standards and who on the whole live up to them. He wants parents who can control themselves, and when necessary control him. Grown-ups must, in other words, be on the side of the child's conscience and see that he does not transgress so far that he feels chaos within and the inevitable sense of guilt and inferiority that go with it.

One of the most puzzling of all educational problems is just what to do when a child seems, according to his age and general development, ripe for the next step forward, essentially ready to give up infantile ways, yet doesn't want to and won't. It must always be remembered, of course, that age itself is no certain indication of readiness. For example, most three-year-olds feed themselves nicely, but there are always those who need help longer and achieve better food habits if given this help. Most children accept a dark room and closed doors at night; others need the door open or a comforting light burning till nine or ten or later. Sometimes a childish habit can be broken suddenly, almost forcibly so it may seem, by a firm adult. Success by this method comes only if the child has been inwardly ready for the change for some time, and merely needed, as it were, to have his particular "crutch" taken away from him in order to walk alone. The method is dangerous in the hands of any adult who is himself stubborn and therefore unable to abandon the method when it clearly does not work and will feel defeated if the situation calls for going back again to a policy of watchful waiting. Discovering the moment of readiness and getting one's teaching in at that point turns out, after all is said, to be no simple rule-of-thumb procedure or matter of laboratory tests. It takes parents with a fine sense for the inner growth processes of their child and great sensitiveness about when and how to act.

This brings us to the second great watchword—*relationship*. The relationships in a child's life must be understood as meaning all of the feelings and emotions, past as well as present, unconscious as well as

conscious, that go on between a child and the members of his family, and later, the other members of his community. The author of the truly revolutionary discovery that feelings and impulses are often unconscious, that in fact we are to a large extent motivated by these unconscious impulses, is, of course, Freud. In the process of studying the sources of adult neuroses Freud has shed immense light on the psychology of early childhood and the nature of children's early emotional ties.

Since children's ties with their parents are both the earliest and deepest, this relationship proves to be the determining element in all others. What we are, whether we are self-confident or self-doubting, generous or mean, loving or hateful, suspicious and withdrawn or realistic and outgoing—all the things that matter most, rest on this early relationship with parents and siblings. Just how these early experiences determine character cannot be stated simply. Here, in fact, lies the whole science of psychoanalysis. Parents should realize, however, that *relationship* implies much more than merely imitating the good or bad example of parents, much more than the good and bad precepts by which children may be guided, more even than the justice or injustice by which they are treated. It has more to do with whether children are loved or not, which is no simple thing; for human love, even the best of it, is perversely compounded with its opposite, and children disappoint and torment their parents in a hundred different ways.

The relationship between children and those who guide them profoundly affects learning of all kinds. Those who try to build character purely through instilling virtues like responsibility, generosity, good concentration and truthfulness by a mere drill process, will be doomed to disappointment.

How, for example, do you develop truthfulness in children? The first principle in truthfulness is that adults should treat children truthfully. It is important that children respect the person whom they also are fond of. It is hard to learn morality from people you hate. If such a person is full of virtue it is apt to set a child against virtue. It is the relationship you have with the child himself through which the child learns. We learn with our feelings, and the way children learn to value courtesy, honesty, kindness, is to see the people they care for practicing these things.

The answer to how you may re-educate a child who tells lies and pilfers, for example, consists not in finding either a suitable punishment on the one hand or, on the other, methods of kindly reasonableness to bring him to his senses. It lies in how to effect a

reconstruction of his entire inner life, and in the process, very likely in the inner life of his parents, too. So with other faults. Children who are chronically destructive have not merely formed a bad habit. They are impelled by inner animosities of which they themselves can give no account to commit aggressions against their world. The child who is failing in school is in all probability doing so not because nobody taught him "good study habits from the very beginning," but because he feels that his teachers are his enemies, or his school subjects have never really met his own needs, or because he is so disturbed emotionally at home or with his friends, that his urge to escape into day-dreaming is overpowering. We see often how children acquire good study habits when they are inwardly free to do so—when a great teacher who fires their interest enters their lives, or when they come bump up against the necessities involved in getting along in some project that meets their genuine needs. Young people who have been slipshod all through school and college may, if the moment is ripe and their own desires marshalled, quite suddenly give themselves wholeheartedly to some real work with its dull moments as well as its bright ones.

Before this war, one heard much grumbling from grown-ups about the irresponsibility of youth. We had failed, it was said, to instil habits of responsibility into young people at an early age. That was why they kept such late hours or ran around in the family automobile or refused to do their share of the routine chores of family life. We should go back, it was implied, to the older puritan ways of forced labor at hated tasks. That was how character was built. But was it? Were we not rather failing to find ways of sending our youth out to tasks worthy of their caliber? We kept them sheltered and provided for, "educated" in ivory towers, smothered, at least among the privileged classes, with "advantages." But suddenly it is the oldsters who must be humble. It is now plain to see what, given the opportunity, they can do—those "irresponsible" ne'er-do-wells, now eighteen or a few years older. Today it isn't the family automobile but bombers over the whole world that keeps them out nights. While we sit securely at home these young people, both boys and girls, are winning the war for us with disciplined courage.

And after the war, what? The army knows it isn't the drill sergeant who builds character, but jobs full of meaning, jobs worthy of one's mettle, and shared with others one can both love and respect. Can we carry this lesson into the more difficult task of peace?

Character Development in Early Adolescence

By PETER BLOS

IN THE in-between age, when a child is neither "pre-school" nor really adolescent, we begin to relax our constant care and watching, and to wonder if we should not tighten up our discipline. Does the growing boy or girl now need new "habit training" to strengthen character? We cannot suddenly relax and leave everything to the child, nor can we continue to supervise his activities as closely as we had done up to now. It is at this point that we parents must make up our minds as to what are really the important factors which influence our children's personality and character development. We know now that this development will grow out of the condensation of experiences which the child has during these years. It is worth while therefore to consider how the controlling forces in the child operate and through what stages they pass.

A young child's sense of responsibility grows out of a happy relationship to his parents or parent substitutes. He will learn to pick up things, remember to put on rubbers, and all the other little things, if he can identify with his mother and accept her way of doing things without conflict. We often see how a long-established "habit" in a young child goes to pieces if the relationship to his parent (or to his nurse or teacher) is disturbed. If, for example, he is jealous of a new brother, or feels that he is not getting enough attention, we should not be surprised if he refuses to comply with the most reasonable demands in order to get the center of the stage.

As the child grows older, during school age and early adolescence, a shift takes place as his world, and his social relationships expand. At this age the child needs to learn to do things because of the satisfaction of doing them, without worrying about such virtues as responsibility or regularity as expressions of his fluctuating feelings toward the people around him. This means that the child has to become more realistic or, in other words, that the faculty within him which has the power of reason, logic, and control, namely the *ego*, has to be developed and strengthened. Growth of this *ego* faculty is a slow process. To have it develop properly, children must be allowed to make mistakes without undue excitement or reference to moral values on our part; they must be allowed to experience the realities of cause and effect directly and realistically.

The development of responsibility in children is definitely dependent upon the ability to keep moral issues out of the realm of their daily routines, out of all the practical and physical necessities which become immensely more complex as they grow older. Only if parents don't make a virtue out of brushing teeth, for instance, can it become a routine which may naturally be forgotten at times, but certainly less often than if it is magnified into a crucial moral issue which calls forth rebellion. The trouble usually is that when children fall down in their routines we are afraid that if we don't tighten the discipline immediately a disintegration will take place.

It is at this point that we need to realize that child training is essentially different from dog training. Our goals for children are different. They must eventually learn to make decisions for themselves. Obviously this is a slow process. Any progress in the acquisition of good habits will break down whenever new aspects of social or physical development take the center of the stage. It is not a simple process of addition: so many good habits to make a well-organized human being, but instead all these habits in themselves have to be correlated and integrated. This is intrinsically a process of growth and development, and not just formalized habit training.

Children, as we have seen, need to be helped to get acquainted with the necessities of life on a level appropriate to their age, and they have to be held responsible to the extent to which they can grasp these experiences. For example, an elementary school child with homework to do over the week-end might profit by having his mother discuss with him when he will be able to do it, and agree to help him by reminding him at the prearranged time. If after this the child does not live up to his agreement, then he must expect, let's say, not to listen to a certain radio program because that time will have to be devoted to his school work. Or perhaps a better example: If an eight-year-old child has a certain favorite radio program to which he is allowed to listen before bedtime provided he has first taken his bath (the time for supper, bath, and radio program having been agreed upon), and then he dawdles after supper so that it is too late for both bath and radio program, he should be made to realize that it would have been better to have stuck to the agreement. We need not

be moralistic about this. The cause and effect relationship, the importance of an agreement, and the settlement of problems by discussion beforehand are clear and realistic experiences from which the child learns. They are essential for the development of a strong ego. This is the place for holding children to their tasks.

It is natural for the young adolescent to rebel against accustomed routines or family practices. He will do this all the more violently if the development of self-discipline throughout his early years has been tied up closely with his parents' approval or disapproval. By rebelling now against family routines he is actually trying to develop an independent self; and this is an important step in his emotional growth. On the other hand, complete license to do as he pleases is not the answer because this gives the young adolescent the feeling of being left out in the cold. A youngster has to be taken into an adult's confidence as to what his wishes are—how he sees the picture. Experiences have to be provided so that he can find unsupervised outlets which will not be harmful to him for this need of independence. We need to provide experiences such as trips alone to friends or relatives, gang adventures, decisions about his own property—whether to sell his electric train or his stamps—and the child needs to be able to do these things without too much parental questioning or advice. Innumerable situations of this sort will come up in every family with a pre-adolescent youngster, particularly a boy, if one watches for them.

This is the period when routines are vigorously questioned. But very often a youngster will not object to them at all if he is allowed to make his own kind of arrangements. For example, instead of fighting about taking a bath at night, as he has been doing for twelve years, he may be glad to take a shower in the morning, and there are many situations in which cleanliness is not of such great urgency. Let him be clean for Sunday school or for grandmother's dinner, but don't ask him to clean up thoroughly when he comes in after a ball game and is going out right after supper to see a friend. This may make a bad impression on your neighbor, but you must make a choice. Which is more important, living in peace with your son or risking a neighbor's raised eyebrows?

Interesting out-of-family experiences in the community, school or clubs are helpful during this transitional period. A youngster finds it easy to relate his developing sense of responsibility to the values and standards of his new group loyalties. But as we

give young adolescents progressively more freedom in situations where parents have no immediate control, we have to be frank and outspoken with them about the possible complications and unexpected experiences they may meet. For instance, if we let a twelve or thirteen year old boy come home alone from a dance in the city, we should also consider him old enough to acquaint him with the unpleasant aspects of urban night life which he might run up against.

The need for personal adventure is certainly a most important aspect during these years. If children get too accustomed to experiences only in fantasy through radio or movies they will lack the first-hand contact with adventure which is the forerunner of the initiative and imagination so important in later years for actively participating citizens. In the pre-adolescent age youngsters welcome any out-of-the-ordinary occasion. The other day, when Spring first came, I watched a group of twelve and thirteen year old boys, who were dying for excitement, spend the night simply sleeping in the yard. Of course they were uncomfortable, they didn't sleep too well, they got dirty and messed up, but it made them more agreeable about accepting later infringements upon their personal freedom which had to be imposed for their own protection.

We as adults are so set in our routines that we very often overlook the pleasure which comes from interrupting them. Every parent can make these observations with youngsters of this age—how they invent the oddest ways of doing things "just for once." And it doesn't mean a breakdown of morale or discipline or the wrecking of good habits if we let them do so.

A MUCH favored means of developing good habits and responsibility is through the assignment of routine tasks such as having a child take his own dishes to the kitchen, sweeping the front walk, taking the dog out, or watering the lawn. It is my feeling that these tasks are usually prematurely imposed on children. They should be preceded by occasional work assignments which are appropriate to the child's span of attention. I don't think there is anything more ruinous to family life than the daily complaints about the child falling down on the job. Of course, the age at which children are able to take on responsibility for routine jobs varies with different children. And we should always remember that it is so much easier to do things together than to expect children to do jobs alone.

Coming back to the subject of comics and radio, I think that these things do satisfy the fantastic and

highly imaginative side of a child's need for adventure. But the only way to have them strike a wholesome medium is to make a child's life an exciting business it itself. And nothing seems to be more exciting to children than a break in the accustomed way of doing things. I think that this offers a wide open field for parents to explore.

What about a child's friendships and their influence on his character? The choice of friends leads to many problems for a parent. Of course children need friends and they should be free to make their own choices. However, it often happens that children select friends whose influence is not constructive, who intensify difficulties rather than help them to be solved. For example, a nine year old girl with little self-confidence, not too successful in her school work, may choose a friend who is scholastically very superior, but who is "bossy" and therefore not very popular. Somehow these two children are drawn together. The shy child enjoys her friend's superiority and her ability to boss others. But this is a case where parents and teachers often feel friendships should be broken up. Even while we respect the integrity of a child's personal choices, we have to admit that there are often real problems in children's friendships which, of course, can only be answered

in each individual situation on the basis of an intimate knowledge of both children involved. One has to see whether a friendship is an enriching experience which leads to an expansion of the child's personality or leads to a further entrenchment into idiosyncrasies. In most cases it is better to keep hands off and let the children work it out themselves.

But adult interference is at times unavoidable. While this is comparatively easy with elementary school children, it is very difficult to manage with young adolescents and should preferably be handled by a teacher or group leader, rather than a parent, since adolescence is a time when the youngsters are ready to rebel against parental authority on any score.

One of the things which strongly distresses parents is the acquisition of "bad language habits." We can always blame this on the child's friends. Obviously they have picked up these words somewhere. However, the influence at home is, in the long run, much stronger than the temporary influence of other children who use bad language. Bad language is something children have to outgrow, and they can only do so by having had a time when they are permitted to use it. Here again, if a moral issue is made of it, bad language becomes more persistent. One thing

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Parents' Questions and Discussion

The questions published here are selected and discussed by the staff of the Child Study Association, and the answers written by various members. The department is edited by Helen G. Sternau.

Do you think it would harm my six-month-old daughter if I took her out with us occasionally when we go visiting? We can rarely leave the house unless we do this because it's so hard to get anyone to stay with her these days.

Many young mothers are faced with this situation today and are finding it necessary to deviate occasionally from the regular routines that used to be considered so sacred. Some babies are more easily disturbed by a change of scene than others, but even for these a break from the usual course of events is a good thing now and then. Actually, the babies themselves are often less bothered by change than are their mothers, who may be anxious and insecure themselves about new situations

for their children. It may be the mother's own tension that upsets her baby rather than the change of routine itself.

If you plan it out in advance, and are resourceful enough to see that your baby's chief needs for food and rest are properly safeguarded, then you should be able to have the peace of mind that will let you both enjoy the experience. It is surely better for you to take your daughter with you occasionally, tucking her away in a quiet room at a friend's house for her rest period, than for you to feel unhappy and cooped up yourself because you cannot get the needed amusement and change. In the long run, an unhappy, restless mother is a great deal worse for a baby than a few minor upsets in routines.

When your child gets to be two or three and is more active and aware of what is going on, it will not be as easy to take her with you as it is now. By that time you may be able to arrange with some friend who has a child about the same age as yours with whom you can take turns—one couple taking

Looking at the Comics

A Survey by the Children's Book Committee of the Child Study Association

JOSETTE FRANK, Educational Associate

MRS. HUGH GRANT STRAUS, Chairman

THE Children's Book Committee of the Child Study Association has watched with increasing interest and concern the growth of comic magazines as a form of children's reading. Approximately twenty million of these magazines are circulated monthly. They appear to have an almost universal appeal to children of all ages and both sexes, regardless of I.Q. or cultural background. The evident absorption with which millions of children follow the comics has challenged parents, teachers and librarians to acquaint themselves more fully with what lies between the covers of these magazines and to understand their appeal.

We have therefore undertaken to study and evaluate about a hundred current comic magazines. It became apparent at the outset that it would be impossible to list any "approved" or "recommended" titles

in this field because of the changing nature of these publications from month to month and the wide range of material that may appear in any one issue. The Committee believes, therefore, that its best service is to analyze the nature of these publications and to offer suggestions by which parents and others may help children learn to discriminate among these as among other forms of reading.

To classify these magazines into types of subject matter is difficult because there is considerable overlapping. But in so far as they can be classified, they fall roughly into the following categories: Adventure, fantastic adventure, war, crime and detective, real stories and biography, jungle adventure, animal cartoons, fun and humor, love interest, and retold classics. The committee has attempted to analyze and evaluate each of these as follows:

Analysis of Content

Comment and Evaluation

ADVENTURE

Adventure permeates most of the comics, in one form or another. By far the greatest number may be said to be sheer adventure stories. These are swift-moving and packed with action. Most of them deal with contemporary life and its accompaniments—cars, planes, guns, bombs, money; workers, industrialists, gangsters, flyers and ordinary people. A very few have historical themes, with knights, pirates or cavemen as central figures. As a rule these stories depict the adventures of one consistent hero and his friends from month to month. A few have children playing a major rôle. Plots are usually far-fetched and improbable. As a rule the plot is complete in each issue, though a few, such as *Dick Tracy*, end on a high note "to be continued next month." In some stories, horror or torture scenes are introduced. Common to all the adventure stories are the elements of danger and suspense, a definite division of characters into "good" and "bad," a noble and fearless hero and a "menace." The good side always triumphs, the bad are punished or destroyed.

The appeal of these stories for children would seem to lie in their speed, in the violence of physical encounters, in a certain satisfying thoroughness of action (mopping up in the end!), in the simple and understandable relation between cause and effect, and in their use of the contemporary scene with its familiar properties. They satisfy children's yearning for action and adventure—however vicariously. Danger is indispensable to adventure, and normal children can take—can even enjoy vicariously—an amazing amount of it. We must differentiate, however, between the threat of danger and the portrayal of horror or torture. While it is true that some children enjoy horror pictures and stories, we believe that there is a limit to their capacity to absorb such material safely. Since we do not really know how much is too much, we believe that cruelty and torture scenes should be omitted from books for children's reading. Suspense most children seem to take in their stride, confident that all will end well—and it always does in the comics!

FANTASTIC ADVENTURE

A large number of stories are fantastic, centering about a superhuman hero such as *Superman* or one with magic powers, as *Mandrake the Magician*. A frequent pattern is the changeling personality, assuming special powers with a change of costume. Sometimes there are also pseudo-scientific devices, usually for grand-scale destruction. The villain is often a "mad scientist," and many of the stories are weird and grotesque. The setting is usually realistic and modern, no matter how fantastic the plot. Sometimes the setting is fantastic, too, as in projections into the future, such as *Buck Rogers*, or some other world or planet peopled with strange creatures and equipped with machines and devices controlling vast areas of action.

These stories seem to satisfy much the same emotional needs as do the traditional fairy tales: escape and wish-fulfillment. The fact that they combine fantasy with current, every-day life adds a satisfying element for our modern children. They undoubtedly serve many children as emotional release for feelings of aggression or frustration, and may have positive value in this respect. Some children, particularly those who are emotionally disturbed or insecure may need to be protected from a too-heavy reading diet of fantastic stories in this as well as other literature. Adults object to a certain sameness about these stories, which may or may not bother the children. They are often not really imaginative but merely variations on a stereotype theme.

CRIME AND DETECTIVE

Stories featuring crime, G-men, and police run through many of the magazines. As a rule the crimes are on a grandiose scale involving elaborate plotting such as bank robberies, hi-jacking, smuggling, gang wars, sabotage, and, currently, black market racketeering. The inevitable pattern is that the criminals are killed or brought to justice and the law emerges triumphant. "Crime does not pay" in the comics! Modern methods of crime detection are played up in some stories. A few are mystery stories but rarely of the deductive type, depending rather on speed and gunplay than on unravelling the mystery. Police and G-men are usually (but not always) represented as being on the job and competent.

Children are fascinated by tales of wrong-doing and evil. The avenging of wrongs and the punishment of evil-doers is a child's own fantasy pattern and such themes run through much of their literature as well as their play. The modern setting of these stories, however, has given rise to a fear that they may "give children ideas" of things to do. There is no competent evidence that reading about crime makes criminals. The motivation toward unsocial acts lies much deeper than any casual contact with ideas on a printed page. Nevertheless, lest children already on the verge of unsocial behavior may find here a blueprint for action, petty crimes such as pocket-picking, shoplifting, etc., should be omitted. From the point of view of sound ethics, children are best served if crime is made unattractive and unsuccessful. The child reader is likely to be less burdened when crimes remain entirely in the adult world—committed neither *by* children nor *against* children. Such crimes as the kidnapping of a child, for example, are definitely threatening to young readers.

REAL STORIES AND BIOGRAPHY

A number of magazines consist of stories from history or current world events or hero tales of the past and present. Stories of this kind sometimes appear in magazines of varied content, but more often they are presented in magazines devoted exclusively to this type, as in *True Comics*. These stories present both historic and current events in dramatic form, with emphasis on action and heroism, both individual and

As a technique for presenting educational material these strips have great potentialities. They provide not only information and education but also the inspiration of actual heroes with whom children can identify. Some children may prefer "true stories" to fiction or fantasy. Some like both. It need not be a question of "either-or." Adults have to guard against pressing the "educational" as the only good

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national. Heroes are men and women from many fields—science, social service, education, politics, and especially the current war.

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reading for children—sheer entertainment is valid, too. These strips must maintain a balance of both or they fail. To offer them as the only sanctioned comics may, however, prejudice young readers against them.

WAR

The war has taken an increasing part in the comics, seeping into many strips, such as *Terry and the Pirates*, which are not primarily war stories. But a considerable number of magazines are devoted entirely to war themes—air, sea or ground combat, spy stories, underground activities in occupied lands, or glimpses into army life here and abroad. Several of these seem to be intended for adult reading in army camps and elsewhere, but some will appeal to children. In stories which deal with spy and sabotage operations, all villains are Japanese or Germans (a noteworthy absence of Italians).

Stories about war and fighting cater to children's natural aggressive feelings and may, to some extent, serve as a release for them. Here children find a chance to participate vicariously in what is going on in the current adult world. Some of the strips in this category have further value in stimulating children's interest in planes and flying, in navy seamanship and in underground heroism in Europe. Whether or not such strips instill in our children hate for our enemy, and whether or not such hate is wise or necessary, are both moot questions about which there is at present no agreement among authorities. The issue is sometimes confused, however, by the injection of the "mad scientist" theme and fantastic characters in war stories. The realities of war are already fantastic enough. Attention might better be focused on the real crimes of Nazism and Fascism.

RETOLD CLASSICS

A number of magazines feature classic stories, abridged into picture-comic presentation. Such tales as the *Three Musketeers*, *Moby Dick*, some of the classic fairy tales, and even Bible stories have appeared in this form. Naturally the more dramatic features of these stories have been chosen for this use, but in those examined the original stories had been adhered to faithfully.

The question is raised whether such abridgements "spoil" the original for reading in its longer and more difficult, but also more literary, form. We know that movies of certain classics have stimulated the reading of the books on which they were based. Perhaps these comics may also be used as an introduction to reading of the originals—particularly of the Bible. Adults should help children make this transition.

LOVE INTEREST

Love enters into only a few of the comics. These picture an adventurous hero who is usually bent on "good deeds" of some sort, an unselfish heroine, and a scheming villain, male or female, or both. A few of these—and fortunately very few—exploit the female form and feature passionate embraces in an obvious bid for sex interest.

Romantic love is a perfectly permissible theme for readers of high school age (younger readers usually skip this kind). But there is a vast difference between romantic love and the sexual stimulation intended by suggestive pictures of amorous or scantily clad women. Such themes and pictures are certainly unsuitable for younger readers and definitely undesirable for adolescents. So also are pictures of chained women, of captive women being driven by men, and other sadistic themes.

JUNGLE ADVENTURE

These are of two kinds—realistic adventures about hunting and the natural hazards of jungle life, and fantastic tales of encounters between jungle beasts

The matching of man's wits against the brute strength of the jungle is an ancient theme and holds a natural interest for children. The introduction of

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and men, as in *Jungle Comics*. Often it is really man against man, with one side using savage beasts against its adversaries. Sometimes women are featured in these stories, as captives or intended victims.

ANIMAL CARTOONS

These are usually on the funny side, featuring many kinds of creatures—chiefly domestic animals—having adventures and behaving in human ways, getting in and out of all manner of scrapes. The prototypes, of course, are the Disney stories of *Mickey Mouse* and *Donald Duck*. The adventures are of the simple cause and effect type, as in *Funny Animals*, with the action less violent than in other adventure comics. Characters are knocked about but nobody gets killed!

FUN AND HUMOR

Many of the magazines—even the adventure books—include a page or two of jokes or humorous strips. A few are devoted entirely to humorous strips. The humor is mostly of the slapstick variety, with incongruous and ludicrous situations, silly names, comedy characters, and contortions of language contributing to the fun. The best of these are, of course, reprints of well-known syndicated strips such as *Mutt and Jeff*, *Blondie*, *Li'l Abner*, and others.

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cruelty linked with sexual suggestion in some of the jungle story comics—as in struggles between rapacious monsters and beautiful half-clad maidens—is certainly not desirable for children's reading.

The humorous adventures of child-like animals doing lively things are always appealing to young children, not only as humor, but also because they follow the child's own fantasy. In a way they represent the large family of many children. These cartooned creatures do all the things children would like to do, but dare not. Children continue to read them even after they begin to look for more exciting and more dramatic adventure stories elsewhere.

Human characteristics and frailties are the basis of these really "comic" cartoon strips which appeal to young and old. Children like especially the slapstick type of humor and the direct cause-and-effect action. These characters are deeply human and talk a language children readily understand. Humorous strips of this kind are all too few in the comic books, despite the fact that there is a real demand for them among young readers.

General Features

LANGUAGE—The language of the comic strips varies widely. In some there is an elaborate and self-conscious vocabulary, certainly beyond the reading ability of many young readers. In others there is a simple straightforward language. Gangster characters and "tough kids" speak the vernacular of the streets. The hero's use of English is usually above reproach, correct in grammar and diction. Foreign agents speak in the stereotyped German or Japanese accented English, while comic characters, like *Pop-eye*, use a nonsensical sort of gibberish. Ejaculations of pain, anger and surprise form a language all their own that defies description!

Children enjoy silly language. They also find a certain pleasure in words that are not "refined." Despite parental fears, such deviations are not likely to affect the language habits of children, which are likely to derive from deeply rooted home and school standards and not from casual contact with any entertainment medium. Even where children do ape certain expressions in the comics, this is a passing and

legitimate form of enjoyment. It is probably also true that boys and girls old enough to read the words in the comics actually enlarge their vocabulary by this reading. Some of these children are not naturally great readers, and from the point of view of reading facility the comics are certainly better than no reading at all.

DRAWING—Drawing and color work in comic magazines show a wide range of quality, not only between different publications, but even within any one publication where several artists are represented. There is some excellent drawing and some fine cartooning as well as much very poor quality. An important factor is that these pictures are readily understood by children. They are the kinds of things children themselves try to draw, full of action and masses of color. Children can be helped to recognize which strips are good of their type and which are poorly drawn.

COLOR—The colors in many seem unnecessarily harsh and garish. In some the colors are bright and pleasantly contrasted, in others they are either clashing or monotonous. The colors in all of the magazines suffer from the poor quality of paper on which they are printed, and the mass reproduction results in the deterioration of the original art work. Some of the magazines show thought and care in art editing—others are obviously careless, as when colors are inconsistent in successive pictures. Children can be made aware and critical of this kind of carelessness in editing.

PAGE ARRANGEMENT—In some of the magazines the page layout is scattered and inharmonious, and the pictures not clearly delineated and sequenced. Those which have an orderly arrangement of pictures would seem to be easier for children to follow. "Orderly" need not mean "monotonous," however, as evidenced by those magazines which vary the sizes of the pictures and still maintain an orderly effect.

PRINT—Because the balloons and captions are hand-lettered, their readability varies greatly. Capitals are used throughout. In some the lettering is larger than ordinary book type and well spaced. The short lines, too, should make for easy reading. In many of the magazines, however, the lettering is irregular, the words are crowded and the lines too close together for clarity. Slant lettering also is less readable. The use of dark-colored backgrounds in the captions and insets greatly reduces the readability. Some of the magazines have learned to use white or light-colored backgrounds for all lettering.

This whole question of legibility is a serious one, for many of the magazines appear to be a strain on children's eyes. Publishers should be urged to remedy this fault and children should be urged to select their magazines with this factor in mind.

COVERS—The covers of some comic magazines are often more lurid than their contents—probably as an attention-getting device, to compete on the newsstands. As a rule the cover illustrates no actual incidents in the stories themselves. A very limited number of comic magazines feature on their covers a scantily dressed girl, usually in distress. This is a device obviously intended to lure older readers, and unfortunately cheapens the whole product.

ADVERTISEMENTS—Most of the comic magazines carry a small amount of advertising. The advertising of products which interest children—such as candy, games, sporting equipment, and so on, is, of

course, perfectly legitimate. Invitations to young readers to sell things in order to win the premiums illustrated must be more carefully scrutinized. Many of these seem to offer too much for too little. While legitimate earning opportunities for young people are desirable, such offers should be checked for their honesty and integrity. Parents can profitably discuss these things with their children.

Advertisements which claim to cure ailments such as asthma, or offer to develop strength and brawn by simple mechanical means, are, of course, misleading and sometimes harmful. Some of the advertisements are printed in small, almost unreadable type.

SPECIAL FEATURES — Children are natural "joiners"; they love to belong to a group. They also love to get mail. The various clubs and societies featured in comic magazines offer both of these satisfactions. The fact that they are a part of the publisher's promotion plan does not detract from this value to the children.

Puzzles, contests, book reviews, invitations to write in, and other special features in some of the magazines are especially valuable in stimulating young readers to activity and participation.

Pros and Cons of Comics Reading

To many adults, all comic books look alike. This Committee, however, finds that these magazines cannot be grouped as all of a kind, or as either "good" or "bad." As in other publications there is a wide variety among them, not only in their content and drawing but in their editorial standards. Some are carefully edited. Others are not. Some have amusing or interesting ideas, others not. Some have good drawing, good color work, good lettering, others not. It is important for us to recognize these differences and to help our children learn to discriminate among them. Here, as in their other reading, children can recognize differences between good writing and poor, between good drawing and bad—all within the limitations of the medium itself. We cannot expect to apply the same literary and art standards here which apply to other kinds of reading. That is not what children want of the comics.

Many parents, librarians and educators have found these magazines a thorn in the side. Their objections have been on several counts, some having to do with the magazines themselves and others with the degree of the children's absorption in them.

Their objections to these magazines are:

1. They lack literary quality.
2. They are esthetically unlovely.
3. They are poorly printed on cheap paper and hard on the eyes.
4. They are full of violence in picture and story.

Their objections to the children's absorption are:

1. They are too easy to read and they spoil the taste for better reading.
2. They are worthless educationally and culturally and therefore a waste of time.
3. They keep children from other activities and interests.
4. They seem to offer escape from real duties.

Many of these objections are valid. Yet some of the fears to which they have given rise seem not to be justified. Many children read good books along with comics. For others, comics reading is a stage through which they pass and from which they graduate with occasional backward glances! Some children, however, seem to find reading of ordinary books an uninviting task, and for such children the comics may well prove to be the only bridge to books, through the very ease and pleasure in reading them.

It is true that children do use the comics for escape—whether from the parents' or teachers' voice or just from the pressure of the many "musts" in their lives. But so have they always used books, and, in recent years, radio listening. These are a waste of time only if we believe that children's hours must all be spent in ways which will be educationally and culturally profitable. The fact is that we do not always know what manner of profit accrues to children from this "wasted" time.

Nor do we always know what they are getting from this comics reading that seems to them so rewarding. Unless we do know this, it is useless for us to press upon them the merits of "educational" reading, or even to attempt to select their comics reading for them. The satisfactions they are getting from the comics vary with individual children—some may enjoy them purely as escape, others may find a useful release for their own aggressive feelings in the slam-bang of the pictured action, still others may find it pleasant to identify with these fabulous characters and thus experience, if only vicariously, the joys of power and triumph. Of course, if a child is disturbed or in deep emotional conflict, he may be further burdened or disturbed by his comics reading. In such

cases, psychologists point out that it is not the comics which *create* fear or distress, but rather the child's own neurotic fantasy which fastens upon the pictured people and creatures to objectify his fears. A child who lies awake nights because of frightening stories, whether in comics or classics, presents special problems which call for careful consideration not in relation to his reading alone but to more fundamental emotional needs.

The question of excessive comics reading is, like all other questions of degree, one which parents and teachers will have to decide in each case. While the *selection* of comics must be the child's own, the *amount* of such reading is properly the concern of the parent. The remedy lies not in forbidding or confiscating, not in bargaining or cajoling ("one comic for every good book you read"), but rather in broadening the child's real experiences and providing him with activities and interests that will compete with the comics for his time and attention. We can, too, capitalize on their comics reading by turning it from a passive into a creative interest. With pencil, with clay and paint, with puppets, children can be encouraged to dramatize their comics reading, giving expression to the emotions which center in its heroes and its furious action.

One must regret that comic magazines have, in some respects, missed their opportunities for giving children more than this. The comic magazine has a high potential value, not only because its form is so acceptable to children but because it can be timely and contemporary in a way that books cannot. Here, perhaps more effectively than elsewhere, we can find an opportunity to give children forward-looking attitudes, ideas and ideals about the world they live in. At present, most of these magazines reflect the status quo in social and political ideology. (The rich are successful because they have worked hard, the workman is poor but proud.) While some of the strips have been used as vehicles for selling ideas—war bonds, salvage, etc.—only a few have shown awareness and a sense of responsibility with regard to social questions. It is a hopeful sign that we do find some adventure stories with such themes as race prejudice, social injustice and labor problems, good neighbor relations in stories of the Latin Americas, and an understanding and appreciation of underground movements in occupied Europe. However crude in presentation, such strips suggest a use for comics that may well be developed further. It is up to us to see that they are constructively used.

Most of the comics are, apparently, directed only

to boys and their interests. This seems to be a serious oversight, since girls are also heavy readers of comics. A few strips, like *Little Orphan Annie*, have girl heroines and attract girl readers especially, but only one whole book, "Calling All Girls," is addressed especially to the interests of girls; this is only partly devoted to comic strips consisting largely of excellent special features, short stories and rotogravure.

However unattractive the comic magazines may seem to us as literature and as art, we must, in evaluating them, be careful to appraise them also through the children's eyes, remembering that our adult appreciations and standards have resulted from a long process of trial and error of our own. Ruthlessly to attack what children value, to reflect upon their taste, is not to help their development. On the contrary, it may only shake their confidence in our ability to "understand." Prohibitions are likely to invite under-cover reading, black market trading, and other evils. All taste is a process of development from the crude to the more subtle forms.

It goes without saying that the reading of comics, to the exclusion of everything else, would be an undesirable literary diet for children. While at one stage, and for a time, they may seem to forsake all else, it is important that children should be introduced to other books and other pictures—always in addition to and with respect for their own choices. We can offer them adventure, mystery, suspense and fantasy in books, too—books which need not be great literature but may serve as a transition to it.

It is important to note that the comics are something which boys and girls can buy for themselves, without benefit of adult supervision; and this very freedom of choice has values of its own. In fact these are almost the only reading that come within the boys' and girls' own purchasing power. If other books—not ominously labeled "classics"—could be made as accessible as ten-cent magazines, we might find children's choices would be wider, though they would undoubtedly continue to read the comics too.

To acquaint children with a wider range of both art and literature is the challenge and the task of parents, teachers, and librarians. It is good pedagogy to begin where the children are. We may well use the comics and their heroes as clues to their young readers' interests, as a basis for helping them progress to other books and other heroes which will serve these same interests.

Furthermore the children are showing us plainly enough the paucity of real and satisfying experiences in their lives. Not more and better reading only, but more and better living and doing and creating will give them some of the satisfactions for which they turn to the comics. Those children for whom home and school are busy, active places, whose work and play are alive and rich with real and meaningful activity, will take the comics in their stride. They will read the comics—yes—for these are today a part of the common reading *mores*. But this reading will take its proportionate place in their full lives, among many absorbing and enjoyable activities.

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